DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 350 897 HE 025 873

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TITLE Linguistic Factors in Academic Achievement.
INSTITUTION Higher Education Extension Service, New York, NY.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 14p.
AVAILABLE FROM Higher Education Extension Service, P.O. Box 40, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027 (free while supply lasts).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT Higher Education Extension Service Review; v3 n4 Sum 1992

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; College Students; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Language Acquisition; *Language Variation; *Linguistics; Phonology; Pragmatics; Pronunciation; Psycholinguistics; Semantics; Sociolinguistics; *Speech Communication; Syntax; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Expectations of Students

ABSTRACT

This report examines the importance of an individual's linguistic capability and its impact on academic achievement. Main areas of examination include an historical perspective on linguistics, descriptions of formal linguistics and psycholinguistics and their role in understanding academic achievement, and the educational implications of linguistic stereotyping. Included within these examinations are descriptions of the subdivisions of linguistic study: phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Also discussed are the major areas of psycholinguistic investigation and their connections between language and thought, the acquisition of language by children, and language variations (subtle or gross differences within the same language such as pronunciation or accent) and their influence in academic success as well as the variables that can create these variations. Finally, it is noted that teachers' reactions to these variables can lead to the formation of initial expectations or academic predictions of the student without knowledge of the student's academic development. Such predilections can compromise the teacher's ability to offer all students an equally effective education. Contains 63 references. (GLR)

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Volume 3, Number 4 Summer 1992

Higher Education Extension Service REVIEW

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Linguistic Factors In Academic Achievement

Communication is central to the transmission of knowledge and skills, and, thus, nowhere is the valuing of an individual's linguistic capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) more crucial than in the arena of education. Accurate assessment of students' communication skills and effective communication with them require a basic grasp of the fundamental concepts of linguistics, and of the relationship between language varieties and cognitive development, as well as the links among emotion, culture, and the perception of dialects.

Stubbs (1986) has suggested that the presentation of linguistics should incorporate three areas: description, theory, and practice. Each of these, then, is discussed below.

A Historical Perspective Of Linguistics

A language is a rule-governed system of vocal sounds (or hand gestures, as in American Sign Language) and their written symbols, employed to communicate and to express thoughts and feelings.

There are four modes of language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Current research indicates that the mastery of all modes is complementary and interdependent. For example, the ability to recognize a word orally helps when it is encountered visually, and the ability to write improves along with the ability to read, which in turn improves speaking skills.

In the past, linguistic research focused on descriptions and comparisons of the structural elements of languages, but advances in artificial intelligence and the advent of cognitive psychology raised the level of interest in the relationship between thought and language, and led to the formalization of *psycholinguistics*. Although thought and language are clearly related, the exact nature of the relationship has not yet been determined. Some see the vocabulary and classification systems of different languages as representative of varying ways of perceiving the world (Whorf, 1956). Others feel that both language and thought are universal in nature, and that only their surface manifestations vary (Chomsky, 1957, 1965). Still others view language acquisition as an integral aspect of socialization (Vygotsky, 1978). Finally, language may be considered a concrete representation of thought and, as such, a tool for higher order and reflective thinking (Smith, 1982).

Studying language within the context of other disciplines, most notably anthropology and sociology, has added breadth to linguistics as a discipline, creating the subfield of *sociolinguistics*. Its premise is that language is more than a means for communicating thoughts and feelings: it is a social phenomenon. Almost instantaneously and usually subconsciously, language conveys the identity of speakers as members of social groups (Milroy, 1982), and it delineates the role relationships between conversants. Saville-Troike (1989) hints at the complexities of what is discerned during interactions when he outlines 14 components of communication, categorized into three groups: linguistic knowledge, interaction skills, and cultural knowledge. Variations among these components contribute to what distinguishes one variety, more commonly called a dialect, from another.

Most recently, questions of practice, especially those relating to bilingual populations entering educational settings and of language planning in newly-independent developing nations, have become more pressing, and have encouraged the growth of *applied linguistics*.

Formal Linguistics

Formal, or structural, linguistics is concerned with the elements of language. The term "grammar" refers to the rules that govern the uses of these elements in each language. The subdivisions of study and their corresponding content include:

phonology: sounds
syntax: word order
semantics: meaning and word structure
pragmatics: language use

Phonology. Phonology considers sounds as meaningful units of lan-

guage. Analysis is focused on the phoneme, the smallest unit of a meaningfully discernably distinct sound. For example, in the word "cats" there are four phonemes: /k/, /ae/, /t/, and /s/.

There are over one hundred sounds found among the more than a thousand languages of the world, although not every language utilizes every sound. For example, English employs about 45 sounds, even though there are only 26 letters with which to represent them. Other sounds are represented by dipthongs (double vowels), such as "oi," "oy," "ow"; vowels affected by "r," such as in "girl" and "her"; letters representing multiple sounds, such as long and short vowels such as the "a" in alone); and letter blends, such as "ch," "sh," "th," or "ng."

Differences in pronunciation among individuals can provide social information about them. An example is Labov's (1967) study of the change in linguistic behavior that accompanied social mobility among groups on New York City's Lower East Side. Lower middle class individuals were the most apt to adjust their pronunciation toward a perceived standard, or more prestigious dialect.

Syntax. Syntax is manifest in two ways: inflection and word order. An inflected language uses word endings (e.g., suffixes) to denote case, number, gender, and tense. In highly inflected languages, such as French, Spanish, and German, the ending of an adjective also changes depending upon whether the noun it modifies is singular or plural (e.g., casa blanca and casas blancas) and its gender, (i.e., whether it is masculine, feminine, or neutral). In English, *inflection syntax* is limited to verbs (i.e., the addition of "ed" to form the regular past tense, as in "he acted," or the addition of "s" to form the third person singular of the present tense, as in "he acts").

In English, relationships are generally conveyed by word order, rather than inflection. For example, "The short dog barked at the fat boy" is significantly different from "the fat boy barked at the short dog." English is so dependent upon word order for clarity that violation of word order rules changes sentence meanings. For example, the placement of adjectives in "The fat dog barked short at the boy" provides erroneous information to listeners accustomed to English syntax. In a highly inflected language there can be more variance in word order because case (subject, direct object, indirect object, and possession) is communicated by suffixes on many of the words.

Semantics. Syntax and phonology are not, however, enough to understand why something is said a certain way or how it is understood; the theory of language must also take into account intended meaning. Semantics, or the study of meaning, is now commonly included as the third aspect of the study of structural linguistics.

The unit of analysis in semantics is the morpheme, the smallest element of a word that conveys meaning. For example, in English, the word "cats" is composed of two morphemes: "cat" and "s". "Cat" is called a free morpheme because it can stand alone with meaning. (The word "at" is found within it, but has a distinct and completely unrelated meaning.)

On the other hand, "s," is called a bound morpheme. That is, its meaning is dependent upon the morpheme(s) to which it is attached. In standard English whenever attached to a noun, it signals a plural. When placed at the end of a verb, (e.g., she sings), "s" signals the third person singular of the present tense. Alternately, when attached to a noun by an apostrophe (e.g., the singer's voice), it signals possession.

Although word order conventions may be observed, misunderstanding can still take place if an incorrect word is chosen. The humor of malapropism plays on this occurrence, and misuse of words generally reflects negatively on the speakers. Also, words with multiple meanings can be prone to misunderstandings (e.g., "the computer ran all night"). And idioms, which are phrases whose meanings do not derive from the common definition of each of the words comprising them, prove particularly difficult for those learning a new language, since literal translations prove completely incorrect (e.g., "I'm all ears").

Pragmatics. Pragmatics examines language in use. Conversations, or discourse, are studied to reveal the dynamic interpretation that takes place between conversants. Important to such study is the concept of context, which is defined as the identities of participants, the temporal and spatial parameters of their conversation, and their beliefs, knowledge and intentions (Levinson, 1983).

Many mannerisms related to contextual factors are subconscious and reflect conversants' cultural and social identities. Difficulties in communication, either between speakers of differing dialects or between a native and a non-native speaker, may be due to inappropriate gestures, eye contact, or proximity, rather than to pronunciation or grammar. Erickson (1986) analyzed conversations where Standard English was native to both speakers, although they were of differing ethnic groups (e.g., Italian American and Irish American). He found that pragmatic aspects of communication such as eye gaze and posture, led to disharmonious interchanges.

Cultural variables in language are very subtle; conversation partners may feel uncomfortable, misunderstood, or unable to comprehend the content of the conversation, although they are unable to pinpoint the source of their unease. They may make subconscious mutual efforts to re-establish understanding, however, the efforts will be undertaken within each conversant's frame of reference, which may intensify discrepancies.

Effective communication is clearly a multi-faceted endeavor, not just the mastery of the structural elements of language initially studied by those working in formal linguistics.

Psycholinguistics

Psycholinguistics is the study of relationships between language and psychological processes. Major areas of investigation include the connections between language and thought, the role of language in learning, and the acquisition of language by children.

Linguistic Determinism. One of the oldest and most persistent debates about the mutual influence of language and thought was spurred by Benjamin Whorf in the 1930s and 40s. Whorf was an engineer who studied anthropology and linguistics as an avocation. His field work on indigenous languages, especially Hopi, led him to formulate the theory of Linguistic Determinism, more commonly known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, that a person's language determines personal perceptions and thought about the world. Whorf (1956, p. 212-213) believed that a linguistic system, or grammar, serves as "the program and guide for the individual's mental activity." Furthermore,

> (T)he world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds - and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significance as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way - an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language.

Whorf presented various examples of discrepancies in the vocabulary and classification systems among different languages. For example, in English, verbs are used to represent action in different times (i.e., past, present, future, etc.), but in Hopi, verbs denote different types of validity (i.e., fact, memory, expectation, and law), with no possible corresponding manner of discussing temporality.

Whorf's theory continues to have an intuitive appeal. It is hard to imagine that, given the numerous discrepancies among languages, individuals using different languages don't make sense of the world in different ways. For example, in English there are three distinct verbs - to wait, to hope, to expect—for the one verb —esperar—in Spanish. On one hand English speakers may wonder how this can be, while on the other hand Spanish speakers argue that it is the entire context of the verb that determines the shades of its meaning.

The Influence of Thought on Structure. Anderson (1990) has suggested that it is also possible that thought influences the structure of language. He cites a finding by Greenberg (1963) that the grammar of 98 percent of the world's languages dictates that the subject precede the object. This seems to make the most sense since the subject acts upon the object. He also notes that languages tend to be comprised of phrases that serve as manageable chunks of information to facilitate comprehension by the perceiver.

For Carroll (1964), the heart of the issue lies with concepts, which he defines as "the internal representation of a certain class of experiences" formed as "the direct response to aspects of the external environment, or responses to other experiences" (p. 81). He notes a high degree of similarity in concepts expressed in the core vocabularies, those 10,000 words of each language used most frequently in everyday talk and in general use writing. He attributes part of the correspondences to similarities among all humans' biological and physical environments.

Lakoff (1987) also argues for the similarity among classification systems of all languages. Specifically, he posits that categories of the mind fit categories and hierarchies of the world. Most commonly used names of things are the equivalent to the genus level in classification hierarchies. He provides examples from the plant and animal domains. At one end of the hierarchy are the broadest terms: "plant" and "animal." At the other are highly specific terms for a type within the term family, such as "cutleaf staghorn sumac." In the middle are the genus terms; "oak" or "maple" or "rabbit" or "cat." Universally across cultures, the genus level terms share the following traits (Lakoff, 1987, p.33-34):

- are named more readily
- have simpler names
- have greater cultural significance
- are remembered more readily
- are perceived holistically
- are learned by children earlier
- correspond to scientific categories extremely accurately

Most salient is the theory that there is greatest universality among concepts at the genus level because that is where people are most able to denote uniqueness without needing to note great detail.

Spacial Orientation. Hill has done extensive work in the spacial orientation of different languages. In his review (1991) of several of his own and his students' studies, he argues that there are differences between the concepts of front and back, and to a lesser extent left and right, as used by Westernized and non-Westernized speakers of different languages. The majority of Hill's data comes from Hausa speakers in Niger, although he has also collected information from Djerma and Arabic speakers, and from rural and urban dwellers in China. Other researchers (see Hill, 1991, p. 18) have also documented evidence of differences between those with Sephardic and Ashkenazic backgrounds on Israeli kibbutzi and between rural and urban dwellers in Sicily.

The basic difference can be discerned when discussing the position of one static object which is visible to the speaker in relation to another static object. In Standard American English it is most common to say that the object farthest from the speaker is behind the object closest to the speaker. Hill labels this orientation face-to-face because the closest object can be thought of as facing the speaker, and, hence, the farthest object is behind it. However, in Hausa the reverse is the norm: the object farthest from the speaker is called "gaba," or front and the object clos-

est to the speaker is called "baya" or back. Hill labels this orientation in-tandem because the closest object can be imagined as facing the same direction as the speaker is and hence the farthest object is in front of it. There is greater similarity of usage when the farthest object is hidden (both use face-to-face) and when the speaker is in motion (both use in-tandem).

Hill also notes that these two orientations can be manifest in temporal relations: moving a date forward in time would mean that it would be later to a person with an in-tandem orientation; it would mean that it would be earlier to a person with a face-to-face orientation.

Social Context. Vygotsky (1978, 1986) has helped to provide theoretical insight into questions of variation among languages and cultures, and how they relate to intellectual development by focusing on language as an integral aspect of social relations. He believed that in adults, language and thought are two parts of a whole, although they do not start out that way.

Vygotsky (1986) characterized an infant's psychological processes as "pre-linguistic" and an infant's speech as "pre-intellectual." The gradual induction into an individual's social group, in which the shared construction of word meanings is integral, facilitates the bond between language and thought. He states, "A connection originates, changes, and grows in the course of the evolution of thinking and speech" (1986, p. 210-211). Eventually, a child can produce "meaningful speech" and "verbal thought."

Since language is closely identified with socially rooted and culturally salient meanings, individuals learn the norms for their culture as they learn the patterns of language use of their community.

The connection between induction into a discourse community and patterns of thought continues into adulthood. Vygotsky (1986) believed that all human perception is organized categorically, rather than in an isolated fashion. The definition of categories as he conceptualized them are not universal, but rather, vary from individual to individual, with the greatest consensus found among members of the same discourse community.

Sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics provides a more detailed examination of the social contexts of language use. The field encompasses descriptive studies of languages and their variations, or dialects, as well as examinations of the impact of attitudes toward dialects on various aspects of life, such as schooling and employment.

Sociolinguistics, like psycholinguistics, has evolved as a cross-disciplinary field. For example, sociologists have looked at the relation of language varieties to social stratification, anthropologists have looked at cultural nuances of communication patterns, and linguists have looked at how individuals use different forms of language depending upon the social situation.

Two concepts lie at the core of sociolinguistics. The first is communicative competence. It refers to an individual's ability to know not only the language, but also "what to say to whom, and how to say it appropriately in any given situation" (Saville-Troika, 1989, p. 21).

The second concept is that of the speech community or discourse community, a socially or culturally self-defined group whose members share norms for communicating. While the boundaries of this community "tend to coincide with wider social units, such as countries, tribes, religious or ethnic groupings" (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972, p. 16), this is not always the case. Further, individuals are not limited to membership in one discourse community. In fact, usually people will interact appropriately as members of different discourse communities during the course of a normal day.

Students often shift among styles of language. Almost instantaneously, they assess the situation and silently answer several questions before beginning to speak. These questions include; "with whom; about what; in what setting; for what purpose; and in what relationship to other communicative acts and events" (Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 54).The ability to do so depends upon prior experience, which has led to a congruent set of expectations, or scripts, about what and how, verbal and non-verbal messages will be received and sent in a variety of situations.

Academic events at a university setting are one such situation and therefore call forth expectations of certain broad communicative norms. These have been labeled academic discourse. The most outstanding quality of this form of discourse is the ability to speak with "the voice, the person - of an authority whose authority is rooted in scholarship, analysis, or research" (Bartholomae, 1986, p. 6). Ability is demonstrated by the incorporation of abstract and elaborated language, as well as the use of conventions such as presenting examples, drawing inferences, and using key terms that are central to specific disciplines. The discourse reveals a mastery of "the institutional structure of knowledge" (Bizzell, 1982, p. 196).

However, within the broad academic community there are numerous smaller discourse communities present on campuses. Individuals may lack experience in certain different discourse situations or with speakers of other dialects or styles. In those cases, exchanges may be labored, since conversants will be unfamiliar with all the variables required for effective communication, such as eye contact, speed of speaking, inflection, and proximity.

In addition, some individuals may deliberately choose not to conform with some communicative norms, opting instead to assert their identities by employing notable identifiers, or speech markers. In other words, they may choose to selectively emphasize those aspects of a group discourse that stand in marked contrast to the norms for the community in which they are conversing. As Fishman (1972, p.4) has noted:

> Language itself *is* content, a referent for loyalties and animosities, an indicator of social

> statuses and personal relationships, a marker of situations and topics as well as of the societal goals and the large-scale value-laden arenas of interaction that typify every speech community (p. 4).

One example of speech marking is the decision of foreign-born residents who consciously opt to keep a slight accent, invoking their language and culture of origin. Another is the use of certain speech rituals by fraternity members, which are impenetrable to outsiders.

In short, every individual is proficient in at least one variety of one language and many are proficient in several varieties and even several languages.

At an individual level, subtle idiosyncracies and highly personal differences or styles define each person's variety, or idiolect. At a broader level, distinguishing characteristics of dialects are shared by a group. These may be discernable by phonology, syntax, or vocabulary, or by other non-linguistic aspects of discourse; but in general the dialect remains intelligible to speakers of other varieties of the same language. Languages encompass the largest group of speakers. Differences among them are grossest, rendering distinct languages almost unintelligible to those who do not know them.

Language Variations

Language variation refers to the differences, subtle or gross, within the same language. Pronunciation, or accent, is one of the most distinguishing aspects of a speech variety. Another distinctive feature is the difference in usage of certain synonyms, such as the words "sack" or "bag," in different locations of the United States. Frequently, individuals choose among alternative conventions depending upon the presenting situation.

Varieties of English are defined by their distinctive grammars, or usage rules, and are legitimate in their own right. Their status - prestigious or stigmatized - is attributed externally, as a social phenomenon, not by some intrinsic superiority. Furthermore, speaking a certain variety of language does not indicate the intelligence of the speaker, as is commonly assumed. Rather, the choice of a certain variety tends to reflect an aspect of the speakers' identity that they consciously or unconsciously may wish to maintain or make known (Edwards, 1985, 1989).

In the United States, English varies among geographic regions and social groups. Two influences upon dialect formation were a direct result of the origins of the early settlers. Some groups came from different regions of Great Britain and brought varied dialects with them. Some came from other countries and brought languages other than English with them that affected the form of English spoken in their communities. The physical geography of the United States also helped to establish dialects because natural boundaries impeded mobility and cross-fertilization of speech variations.

More recently, the relationship between social groups and the dialects of American English popularly associated with them has been an object of study. Often the actual differences in language are minor, creating more of a continuum than a discrete break. However, native speakers of a language are attuned to these finely differentiated aspects of speech and unconsciously assign social status and ethnicity to speakers. This is most true for socially stigmatized speech styles. Wolfram (1981) suggests that in the United States this is because negative responses to socially stigmatized linguistic items and behavior are more frequent and more pronounced than positive responses to socially prestigious items and behavior.

Some of the factors that come into play in creating varieties are discussed in greater depth below. It should be noted that these factors are usually interrelated.

Geographic Variations. Carver (1987) presents a comprehensive description of dialect regions in the United States, including their historical and cultural origins. He notes that there are "five original coastal centers from which most American dialects developed: Boston, Philadelphia, tidewater Virginia, Charleston, and New Orleans" (p. 7). He divides his exposition of current American English dialects into six main regions, each containing several distinct sub-regions. His conclusion asserts that languages and their varieties are dynamic; attempts to record usage is at best a momentary snapshot.

Nevertheless, individuals do have mental maps of dialect boundaries. Preston (1986) conducted a study to reveal perceptions of speech variation in the United States. He asked undergraduate residents from Hawaii, Michigan, Indiana, New York State, and New York City to outline and label maps indicating regional speech areas. The most significant commonality was an area labeled "South." Other outstanding areas included "Midwest" and "New England" or "Northeast." Two cities were also explicitly mentioned: New York City and Boston. Most maps also indicated considerably more detail, delimiting ten to fifteen distinct areas, although almost idiosyncratically.

Preston concluded that "dialect perception is generated by linguistic differences, popular culture caricatures, and local identification strategies" (p. 237). Interestingly, he noted an evaluative aspect to the labeling. Although the term "dialect" was never mentioned, due to its negative connotation, "words such as twang, slang, normal, standard, pidgin, drawl, proper, snob, regular, perfect, stuffy, and slurred abound[ed]" (p. 238).

Environmental Variables. One of the factors that influences communicative norms is the existence of rural and urban enclaves within regions associated with certain dialects. A discourse community's relative physical and/or cultural isolation, or its contact with and exposure to members of other speech communities, are among the reasons for norm differences within regions. The desire to communicate

group membership and community through speech are also factors.

Socioeconomic Status. Many linguists have looked at socioeconomic status in studying speech differences. Typically, socioeconomic class is characterized by three factors: family income (adjusted for family size), education of the subject(s), and occupation of the breadwinner. Two of the most influential linguists in this area are Basil Bernstein, working at the University of London Institute of Education, and William Labov, when he was at Columbia University in New York City.

Bernstein (1967) postulated that children's speech codes reflect the social relations in their home environment, which is evident in "both the planning procedures used in the preparation of speech and the orientation of the listener" (p. 126). He noted two types of speech patterns: a restricted code and an elaborated code.

A restricted code is employed when the speaker emphasizes the commonality of experience, when the words and organizing structure of an interaction are wholly predictable for listeners and speakers, and when the communicative act tends to be ritualistic in form. Here, the emphasis is on non-verbal signals, with vocabulary generally concrete, narrative, and descriptive. Bernstein provides examples of youths who, when describing a story, employ mostly pronouns instead of nouns. For example, they may say, "He threw it there," rather than "The little boy threw the striped ball at the tree."

An elaborated code requires verbal explicitness because there is no assumption of shared context. The emphasis is on creating an organizing structure through which meaning can be conveyed. The child whose experience has been verbalized in an elaborated code learns a difference or separateness of self from others, and views language as a means for presenting the self to others.

Again, Bernstein (1967) emphasizes that the employment of one code or the other does not indicate cognitive aptitude. Rather, it reflects an orientation toward discourse strategies that is learned from the social environment.

> Children who have access to different speech-systems (i.e., learn different roles by virtue of their status position in a given social structure) may adopt quite different social and intellectual procedures, despite a common potential (p. 127).

Problems only emerge when, in the broader society, success is dependent upon the use of one type of code instead of another. In most industrialized western nations, schools and colleges expect students to display proficiency in the elaborated code that may not conform to their local speech-system.

This expectation derives from the role of formal education in developing what is considered to be a literate populace. For example, in early childhood classrooms, activities such as "sharing time" are used to help children verbally develop the discourse styles that they will later encounter in school literacy texts, often called story grammar. Michaels and Cook-Gumperz (1979) characterize this discourse as including a decontextualized approach to a topic such that:

(1) objects are to be named and described, even when in plain sight;
(2) Talk is to be explicitly grounded temporally and physically;
(3) discourse is to be tightly structured so as to highlight one particular topic (which then makes it sound "important"); and
(4) thematic ties need to be lexicalized if topic shifts are to be seen as motivated and relevant (p. 8).

Bernstein's (1973) later findings were that there is a strong propensity for individuals from lower SES groups to use a restricted code (i.e., language grounded in an immediate context, which they assume is shared) and for middle-class individuals to use an elaborated code (i.e., relatively context free and verbally explicit language, such as that characterized above). Thus, school expectations for communication norms are at odds with those learned by low SES students. To succeed in the classroom, low SES students, under present arrangements, have to learn a new variety of discourse. However, acquiring this new speech style puts them at odds with their own family and community norms, unless they learn to shift between codes. This demand places an extra load on cognition.

Potential for academic success is further compromised by the similarity between discourse conventions of the elaborated code and school literacy. Literacy has traditionally been taught as a decontextualized set of technical skills (Cook-Gumperz, 1986). Lack of such skills, as measured by standardized tests, are often viewed as deficits reflecting an inability to perform literate reasoning, and lead to prescriptive practices by educational institutions.

Of course, varieties of discourse norms and literacies possessed by culturally diverse students are not deficits. Rather, they indicate that either the individuals who are proficient in them need to learn other varieties of discourse patterns and literacy practices in order to succeed academically, or educators need to take account of legitimate varieties when planning curricula and designing assessment instruments.

Labov's work (1964, 1966, 1967, 1970, 1972) was influential not just for its pioneering results, but also for its methodology. He postulated and proved many times that, in fact, only a few significant speech features distinguished dialects. Usually these were phonological (such as the pronunciation of the vowel in the word "ride"), but in some cases they also involved aspects of syntax (such as the formation of the double negative). In fact, he stated that the most significantly distinctive social contrast in American English was the vowel sound found in the pair "cot" and "caught," which he believed to be pronounced the same by about half of the United States population (Shuy, 1964).

Labov was (1964, 1966, 1967, 1970, 1972) also careful to isolate what he called contextual style, the differences created by formality and intentionality. He found within all

socio-economic groups, a regularity of transition that reflected a decreasing "use of stigmatized forms with increasing formality of context" (1964, p. 82). In other words, as people paid more attention to how they spoke, they consciously decreased their use of forms generally perceived as stigmatized.

However, there was a striking disregard of the convention to decrease use of stigmatized forms in formal discourse by one group of participants. In noting the downward mobility of a group of African Americans, Labov stated that, "(B)road social and economic forces seem to account for the[ir] inability to maintain middle class status" (1967, p. 69). The bulk of his later work (e.g., 1970, 1972) focused on explorations of Black Vernacular English.

Labov (1964) also looked at the acquisition of adult norms across social classes. He proposed a six-stage process. Children first learn the basic grammar and lexicon of their home language in order to communicate with their families. Second, between the ages of five to twelve they pick up the local dialect of their peers and begin learning to read at school. Third, in early adolescence and with exposure to other speech styles, teenagers become aware of the social significance of their own dialect.

During the fourth stage, where there is significant exposure to discourse conventions outside of the community, individuals learn how to modify their own dialects in formal settings that require the prestige standard. Contact with people from differing discourse communities is the key feature in fostering an individual's ability to choose an appropriate dialect. For some this may take place in high school. For others, this may not occur until they go to college. And there are those who never have the opportunity to interact extensively with people from other discourse communities, and they never learn how to shift among dialects.

The last two stages of acquisition are not reached by all individuals. Labov suggests that a fifth stage is primarily reached by the middle class who learn to use a standard speech style for an extended period of time. Very few people reach the sixth stage, mostly those who are college educated and who have a special interest in speech, which is a command of a fluency in a "range of styles appropriate for a wide range of occasions" (p. 92), such as bilingual college students. Interestingly, those who spoke consistently in a prestige variety are more often unable to speak in a vernacular dialect (Labov, 1964).

Labov (1964) analyzed the difficulties encountered in school by children who speak a non-standard, or stigmatized, dialect such as those popularly associated with racial and ethnic minorities. He argued that there was a discrepancy between the variety of English that teachers rewarded in classrooms (although they themselves tended to use a dialect closer to that of their students) and that which the students actually used. He believed that the primary interference with students acquiring Standard English stemmed from a conflict of value systems. This factor far outweighed two other obstacles: the isolation of non-standard speakers from standard variety speakers, which afforded them little exposure to prestige varieties; and the structural interference that occurred when the elements from one dialect or language did not correspond to another, and created confusion, or interference, in the learner.

As indicated above, identification with peers and family is expressed by sharing the norms of their speech community. So, to shift to another dialect, i.e., Standard English, would be tantamount to rejecting them and their values. Further, "Most of the factors that influence speech performance lie well below the level of conscious awareness" (Labov, 1964, p. 78). Although students may wish to succeed academically, strong subconscious forces may prevent their doing all that is necessary (i.e., changing their speech patterns) to ensure success.

Ethnic Membership. The United States is populated with individuals of highly diverse ethnic origins, and often speech patterns are associated with specific ethnic and racial groups.

Heath (1983, 1986, & 1989) has conducted many studies recording oral and literate traditions in various student homes and comparing them to the language and literacy practices of schools. As might be predicted, she found a rich diversity of home experiences; however, there was often an incongruence with school conventions. She concluded, as did Bernstein and others already cited, that differences in language use seemed to portend a lower chance of academic success.

In one study, Heath (1989) compared language use in poor black urban communities with that found in schools and with that demanded in the workplace. She found a closer match between the communities' norms and those of the workplace than between either of these two and the school.

In the communities she studied, children were socialized to use language in several ways. They were expected to be active listeners among adult conversants and were rarely addressed directly. When children were asked a question, it was because an adult didn't know the answer, rather than as a way to test or reinforce learning or storytelling norms. Commands and reprimands were direct instead of indirect; phrases like "Would you please" were not used. Demonstrating verbal dexterity and wit in front of the group was valued and multiple conversations took place simultaneously. Meaning was determined from written material by groups, rather than by individuals. Typically, one person read a text, such as a newspaper article, sentence by sentence, as the group commented on it, reaching a consensus about its meaning. Roles, especially that of the children's caregiver, were fluidly exchanged among community members; children were not cared for exclusively by their mother.

Heath argues that these experiences produce values and skills that

correspond to those demanded by employers. She (1989) notes that work sites now require shared knowledge building and collaboration among employees, along with individual commitment and responsibility. Common oral language uses include asking for clarifying information and giving directions, presenting summaries from memory and plans for long- and short-range objectives, and interacting with co-workers about recommendations or assessments in effective and non-threatening ways.

Heath believes that "schooling does not mesh well with either nonmainstream communities or workplaces" (1989, p. 371). In classrooms, the display of knowledge is done competitively among individuals, contrary to the collaborative demands of work and the communal nature of group discourse in black communities. The emphasis is on learning to read and write instead of on reading and writing to learn. In addition, literacy is viewed as discrete mechanical skills, with little relation to social contexts for making meaning or for applying knowledge to problems solved in the work place.

Heath (1989) prescribes a reexamination of the uses of oral language and literacy in educational institutions in relation to the customs found both in the various communities from which the students come and in the work environments into which they will go.

Kochman (1981) has written about the conflict that often occurs between blacks and whites in college classrooms because of their differing styles of communication, focusing on the misunderstandings that arise because of the different forms of expression and participation indigenous to each group. His analysis has evolved from years of doing ethnographies of language use in black communities, as well as observing student interactions in his own communications courses at the University of Chicago.

Kochman believes that the greatest gulf in norms exists in the role of affect in discourse. Black students expect emotions to signal the speaker's relation to the material. The more personally important it is, the more apparently emotional the speaker is expected to be. Conversely, white students adhere to a split between emotion and reason, and fear that the injection of emotion into a discussion indicates that it is getting out of hand. These conflicting expectations lead both groups to distrust the sincerity of the other in an interchange, since each places value on opposing styles of discourse.

These differences in style are paralleled in conventions for presenting evidence, according to Kochman. Black students expect speakers to be personally involved in the point of view they present. White students rely on a stance of neutral objectivity as promulgated by the scientific method. They tend to refer to a published authority, rather than relate material to their own beliefs. Again, these conflicting norms lead to mistrust by both groups.

Kochman states that norms for turn-taking are one of the most notable differences. Black norms dictate that individuals compete for the floor, so that one must be keyed into the give- and- take of the debate and be able to assert oneself at the correct moment. White norms recognize an outside authority who designates who can speak and continue to do so until all of his or her points have been made. Blacks may view white norms as tedious, while whites frequently label black norms as rude.

Group identity also comes into play in mixed race groups. Blacks may be hesitant to "disagree with each other in front of whites" (Kochman, 1981, p. 31), while whites may "fear that they will be chastised by blacks for personal views that they might reveal" (Kochman, 1981, p. 32). Sadly, unresolved issues from the greater society, such as racism, influence reactions to and perceptions of the differing communicative norms for each group.

Kochman did note that changes in behavior and attitudes became apparent after blacks and whites had interacted with each other for about two academic quarters and within a classroom environment geared to understanding and respecting their differences. Generally, however, interracial exchanges do not take place within this type of context, but are instead accidental or unmediated. Kochman suggests that in such circumstances the glare of difference is likely to blind the conversants to the intended content of their exchange.

Several studies (e.g., Labov, 1972; Dillard, 1972; Harrison & Trabasso, 1976; Smitherman, 1977; Spears, 1984; Foster, 1986; Stockman & Vaughn-Cooke, 1989; Goodwin, 1990) have been undertaken to document the grammar of Black Vernacular English. While generalized principles may be helpful, it is important to keep in mind that is all that they are. Not all Black Americans speak Black English, nor will an individual necessarily do so in all circumstances.

In fact, Spears (1984) has argued that the term "Black English" refers to "a continuum of varieties of English in the United States spoken almost exclusively by Blacks" (p.94). At one end of this continuum is a variety he calls "Standard Black English." The distinctive qualities of this variety are found in its "tense-aspect-mood" rather than in the syntax (word order) that is employed.

Spears suggests that some blacks can opt to use a form of Black English that is almost identical to Standard English. It is generally employed in formal situations, such as schools and places of business. The features typically attributed to Black English, such as double negation or the non-standard conjugation of the verb "to be" as in "he be reading," are absent from this variety of Black English.

Spears postulates that this apparent similarity is actually a camouflage: words, phrases, and clause constructions may appear similar or identical in pronunciation to ones in white dialects, but they differ in the intent of their meaning or use. The distinction is revealed in

the suprasegmental aspects of language, such as tempo, rhythm, tone, and stress, so named because in phonetic transcriptions these qualities are denoted by the above segment symbols. An example is the sentence, "He's been living here," which conforms to the syntax of Standard English, but in which the word "been" is stressed in Black Standard English to denote an action that began in the remote past.

Spears also suggests that it is primarily middle-class African Americans who employ this variety. Since they have assimilated to the greatest extent in mainstream economic, political, and social institutions, they have a mastery of the variety that is required in those settings, i.e., Standard English. However, there are other social situations that demand an alternate demonstration of group identity; then, expressing aspects of black identity are most appropriate, and Standard Black English is chosen.

Numerous studies have been undertaken to examine, from a linguistic perspective, the schooling experiences of other ethnic groups, as well. Among them is Philips' (1972) pioneering study of schools within an American Indian community in central Oregon, in which she coined the term "participation structures." This defines situations where a confluence of factors, such as setting and participants, determine the type and manner of participation that is to take place.

It is a particularly salient concept because these structures are culturally determined. In her study, Philips (1972) examined how the norms for participation in schools contrasted with those in the community. She noted that

> some of the social conditions governing or determining when it is appropriate for a student to speak in the classroom differ from those that govern verbal participation and other types of communicative performances in the Warm Springs Indian community's social interactions (p. 371).

In the classrooms Philips studied, she identified four types participation structures, although in all the teachers expected to retain ultimate authority for determining movement and acknowledging speakers. They were characterized by:

(1) teacher interaction with all of the students;
(2) teacher interaction with some of the students, while others work on their own;
(3) all the students work independently at their desks, with the teacher available for student-initiated interaction; and
(4) students work in groups, although within the range of the teacher's gaze and with a student as teacher in absentia.

Although the Indian students floundered in most structures, they flourished in the peer directed structure which was, unfortunately, least employed.

Philips also described the transmission of knowledge in the community. First, individuals silently observe; second, they participate in parts of a supervised activity with some verbal interaction; and third, each self-tests in private only sharing the successful results when the individual so chooses. Activities that are community-wide (in the way that schooling is) are characterized by their openness to all, the fluididty of leadership roles, and the accessibility of participation to all attendees.

Philips concluded that the community experiences stood in sharp contrast to the expectations of teachers in three ways. First, the Indians were used to participating as a part of a community, but the classrooms were structured so that the teacher was outside of the group. Second, the Indians' sense of communal decision-making was violated by the teacher's role as the single authority. And third, the Indian experience of self-determined access to participation was contradicted, because in school students were not always welcome to participate nor were they allowed to choose when to do so.

Thus, mastery of the same language code should not lead to the assumption that broader communicative norms are shared (Philips, 1972). Norms vary among discourse communities that use the same language, and they are an integral aspect of self-identity (Milroy, 1982). In Philips' study it is clearly not the language code per se that impeded the students from participating in the ways that were expected by the teachers, but rather the mismatch between expectations for social relations and for language use, or participant structures.

Gender Variables. Interest in gender as an aspect of identity that influences speech style remains high, as witnessed by the continued presence of Tannen's (1990) *You Just Don't Understand* on The New York Times' bestseller list. Her main argument is that women tend to seek community through discourse, whereas men tend to compete. This leads women to talk about issues, while men seek to resolve them.

Spender (1980) argues that the English language serves to perpetuate patriarchy. The deference to male pronouns in non- gender-specific situations is one example. She reviews many hypotheses and studies that examine how language is used by members of both sexes, as well as the kind of language (i.e., words and grammar) that are ascribed to males and females. She notes that an awareness of both how language reflects male dominance and the ways in which language contributes to our perception of the world is necessary to create a society more hospitable to women.

Age Variables. Wolfram (1981) suggests that there are two ways in which age differences contribute to language styles. The first reflects the dynamism of language: the changes that occur with the passing of generations (e.g., the lessening use of "whom"). Alternately, the social significance of features can change as well, so that using a phrase like "far out" may once have shown contemporary hipness, but its use today would be anachronistic.

Changes in language use across

a person's life span is another way that age influences style. Wolfram notes that successive generations of teenagers develop their own slang and that they like to use vulgarities and socially stigmatized speech. As they mature into middle age, however, these habits slip away.

Other Variables. Audience, or those with whom a person is attempting to communicate, is also a crucial element in determining style of conversation. Conversants' readings of each other's identities help them to decide whether they share each other's expectations for discourse or not, as well as their relative standing. They then adjust their choice of words or mannerisms as they believe appropriate. Audience is an especially important factor in written communication. Since writing is usually done in isolation, but to an imagined reader, the writer's conception of the reader helps determine how written material is presented.

Another key element influencing communicative norms is setting, which on occasion actually dictates the behavior that can take place within it. For example, a church setting clearly indicates certain physical behaviors as well as language choices, such as the volume of speech and topics of conversation, although other behaviors might be permissible elsewhere, such as in a park.

The importance of topic or content within communication was made explicit by Hymes (1974). Along with the message's form, its content is central to effective conversation. Hymes noted that the ability of members of a group to "know what is being talked about, and when what is talked about has changed, and manage maintenance, and change of topic" (p. 55) is one aspect of communicative competence that facilitates coherence of discourse.

College language reflects the increasing specialization of disciplines. Colloquially referred to as jargon, much of this language is incomprehensible to those outside of the group, i.e., those not schooled in that specialization. Computer terminology is a prime example of jargon, especially since technology keeps advancing, so that terms such as "scroll," "drive," "mouse," and "menu" all take on new meanings. Moreover, expanding uses of the concept of literacy (e.g., computer literate) reflect a general sense that being knowledgeable about an area and being able to use that knowledge is increasingly dependent upon a fluency of discipline-specific language.

Choice of language can also influence perception of the meaning of the concept being represented. For example, language can be used to distort the reality of a situation, such as in military terminology created recently (e.g., "the town was neutralized").

Educational Implications Of Linguistic Stereotyping

Much has been written (see Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Rist, 1970; Anyon, 1980; Cooper & Good, 1983) about the fact that teachers form initial expectations about their students with little knowledge of students' academic development, and that once tracked on a lower educational course, students find it difficult to elevate their position. Jussim (1986) has produced a model of self-fulfilling prophecies based on an integrative review of this literature. He lists several factors that contribute to a teacher's predictions about a student, which concern linguistics. One of the earliest series of studies undertaken in the United States that clearly articulated the connection between teachers' attitudes toward students' dialects and differential expectations for academic performance and success was conducted by Williams, Hewett, Hopper, Miller, Naremore, & Whitehead (1976). The studies made the link between previous studies in the United States and Canada that had analyzed the relationship between social stratification and language variation and their own work.

Williams et al. defined attitude as a "predisposition to behave or respond in a certain way" (1967, p. 5). This can be evidenced in the way that people respond to stigmatized grammar usage and pronunciation; assign personality characteristics based on cultural stereotypes; hire and promote based on these factors; and the way that teachers evaluate students' speech in order to determine whether they are disadvantaged or at-risk.

In a study by Williams, et al. (1976), they found that two factors could account for the majority of the teachers' reactions: "confidence-eagerness" and "ethnicity-nonstandardness." The researchers then identified five elements of students' speech that contributed to these perceptions: (1) the rate of production (syllables per second) and amount and types of hesitations; (2) the total amount of speech produced by the student, (3) the elaborateness of phrase and clause construction; (4) the grammatical perspective (i.e., first or third person) and overall organization of the students' response; and (5) evidence of stigmatized grammar and pronunciation. Of these, the most salient predictors of low ratings were silent pausing and deviations from Standard English.

Another analysis by Williams et al., of the responses of white and Mexican American teachers to white and Mexican American students showed that both rated the white children as more confident, less ethnic-sounding, and with higher academic promise. It was only in the Non-Language Arts areas such as music, arts and physical education that each group of teachers rated students with the same ethnicity as their own as having better capabilities.

The researchers (Williams et al., 1976) thus concluded that the most salient variable in a student's education is the teacher.

In their review of studies that examine the potency of attitudes toward language varieties, Giles, Dewstone, & Ball (1983) assert that language attitudes are dynamic and subject to change. As shown above, speakers choose to speak a certain variety of language because of complex reasons related to their perception about their place in

society. Likewise, perception of the speech varieties used by other individuals is tied to a maze of social and cultural factors.

Williams et al. (1976), however, found that training and experience with diverse groups of students can mitigate acceptance of damaging stereotypes and counteract the tendency to view language differences as a deficit. Such training and experience therefore, can contribute significantly to teachers' effectiveness with all of their students.

Accordingly, it is necessary for all professional educators to become aware of their own perceptions toward the language varieties and competencies that each student brings to the educational setting, and to work to overcome those perceptions that might compromise their ability to offer all students an equally effective education.

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REVIEW is a quarterly publication of the Higher Education Extension Service
621 West 145th Street
New York, New York 10031.

Chairman: Charles J. Hamilton, Esq.
Director: Carole Morning

This issue of REVIEW was made possible by grants from the Exxon Education Foundation and Aetna Foundation, Inc.

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